

February 5, 2020

To: Flathead county Zoning Planning

Re: Conditional Use Application for Ranger Springs Farm, Bigfork

From: Owner: Reed Darrow, Ranger Springs Inc. 1355, Creekside Ct, Kalispell Mt 59901

Operator, DA Management Corp. Doug Averill, Pres. PO Box 248, Bigfork, Mt. 59911

**Conditional Use Application:**

The property, known as Ranger Springs Farm is seeking a conditional use permit for a Camp-Retreat designation within the Bigfork Zoning District's Ag -40 zone, located 3 miles north Bigfork on Highway #35.

**Proposed concept for the future:**

The Farm will continue agriculture operations and will look and function basically the same as in the past. The vision is creating a community accessible farm, to include people of all ages, primarily youth, to engage in farm chores and activities, to learn from hands on experiences. Organized activity would offer a variety of equestrian, agricultural, educational and fun programs. The Farm is home base to a 501-c3 public Charitable Foundation with the theme of 'Preservation of the Early West'. The Foundation will focus on presenting western historical display items and hosting; special needs and terminally ill children for a day on a Farm.

Numerous buildings exist, with no significant new buildings planned. The next two years projects include; updating infrastructure, replacing corrals and equestrian facilities and updating irrigation systems for additional crop production.

**Background:** The Farm was homesteaded around 1886 at the headwaters of the Spring. The fertile land was used to produce high quality seed. The next owners raised potatoes and over 2,000 hogs, which faltered in hard times. More recent decades the farm produced hay and cattle.

**The Applicants:** The owners, Reed and Kathy Darrow are dedicated to preserve the farm in open space. The Averill Family of Flathead Lake Lodge is the new long term operator tasked with enhancing the property. The families are both multi- generational in Bigfork and have the best interest of the community at heart.

**A. The site is suitable for the use:** The Farm is unique for adding low impact multi-uses, which will require almost no change in facilities. The property has abundant access, infrastructure, varied terrain, seclusion, and open space. The 120 year old farming and livestock operations would be enhanced.

1. The Farm is 470+- acres. New activity would take place primarily at the homestead, livestock barns and riding arena. The balance of the property is timber and pastures. Some uses would move about the entire farm, such as herding cattle, sleigh rides, horse rides, education walks or bike trails.

2. **Access** is available from eight ingress/egress roads. Three 60' paved accesses from highway #35, and five accesses from two County roads. One access from paved Riverside road and 3 from graveled Ramsfield road.

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3. **The property is absent of environmental** constraints as very little building, roads or excavation is required. The Spring and creek flows have remained the same for decades. No mining or gravel pits are on site.

**B. Appropriateness of Design:**

1. **Parking;** Multiple parking areas are available around the houses, barns and service buildings, in the least visible locations. Occasional event parking would be in open meadows.

2. **Traffic;** Circulation begins from highway #35. Multiple other entries would be minimal use. All accesses have good visibility. There are no designated streets. Circulation within the Farm will be primarily foot, horse, wagons, bikes and tractors.

3. **Open Space;** the farm will retain the same amount of open space as today.

4. **Fencing and Screening;** Livestock fences will be updated or replaced. The entire perimeter is woven wire with two top barb wires for a secure perimeter fence. No screening is required.

5. **Landscaping;** The homestead will receive a face lift to include tree plantings, lawns irrigation and flower gardens.

6. **Signage;** The main entry is an overhead gate with small Ranger Springs sign in ranch character . Any signage will be minimal and limited to information, trail signs, educational or history boards, all in rustic design.

7. **Lighting;** Buildings have conduit wiring, some with 3 phase power. The Farm's electrical infrastructure is extensive and adequate for future needs. Any new lighting will be 'dark sky' ground oval lighting. Existing utility company orange yard lights are under scrutiny to add reflector shields.

**C. Availability of Public Services:** No public services for water or sewer exist. Natural gas is on site.

1. **Sewer; Addressing solid waste:** Three septic systems service the living facilities, providing seven restrooms for staff and limited visitors. The ground level restroom will be refreshed to provide handicap access in a central location. If needed in the future, a central septic system could be added based on toilet to use ratios, engineered to meet all standards. A stand alone restroom building could pressure pump to a new septic system. For any special events, portable restroom would be utilized.

Three future drain field locations have been identified on the map with adequate space for mixing zones. There is an abundance of acreage with gravel soils.

Commercial garbage service is available for on- site pick up. The Bigfork refuse site is one mile.

2. **Water;** Domestic water will be provided by a new well. Grounds irrigation and livestock water comes from the existing spring. Field irrigation drafts from the pond. Extensive water rights are recorded for farm, livestock and domestic use.



The pond level is head gate controlled, creating a 22' waterfall that tumbles to a small creek meandering ¾ mile to the Flathead River. This area has a fenced perimeter to minimize livestock from trampled the banks. A small wetland is located south of the creek, surrounded by 3 acres of forest. This area will remain natural to become a study area for learning about the importance of riparian areas and habitat.

**3. Storm Water Drainage;** The east side of the farm is gravel base with no notable runoff. The fields are level and absorbent soils with minimal runoff. If there is any runoff, it flows into the forested area. Minimal spring runoff in the S/E pasture flows through a grass ditch to the wetland which offers beneficial natural filtration. A new livestock watering system will be installed at the corrals, thus limiting animals from creating trails that lead to the creek. Best farm practices will be in place for managing crops, weeds, fertilizers, chemicals, wildlife, water, compost and livestock to improve surface and ground water quality.

**4. Fire Protection;** Ranger Springs is the boundary of Bigfork and Creston fire districts, approximately four miles from each station. There are two houses; all other buildings are farm related buildings. There will be no significant change in buildings. Ranger Springs keeps a modern Mack pumper fire truck on site for open burning and added protection. Fire district requirements would not increase from previous service.

**5. Police Protection;** No added police protection is required, possibly less, in that the property will now have a security systems and on- site staff to provide basic security at all times, including events.

**6. Streets;** There are no streets, just interior farm roads.

**D. Immediate Neighborhood Impacts;** Ranger Spring's homestead and livestock barns are a private setting and distant from neighbors. The surrounding neighborhood is a mix of businesses, farms and residences. The neighborhood is generally larger acreages, further providing distance from neighbors. Nearby commercial activity includes State Fisheries; USFS tree farm; Hops farm, equestrian training facility, construction yard, state highway gravel pit and trucking business. Residences on the east perimeter are more than a half mile from the homestead. On the highway are three neighbors just under a half mile from the homestead, those being a church, residence and dock business. The highway right of way is exceptionally wide bordering the Farm. This large buffer appears to meander over 170' wide from N to S along the highway. The proposed uses are low impact and would mostly go unnoticed.

**1. Traffic Generation;** Day to day traffic would be minimal in relation to the neighboring churches and businesses and should not create traffic flow issues. The traffic volume is not anticipated to require more than one access point, but the option is always available that could disburse traffic among three ingress, egress points to and from the highway.

**2. Noise and Vibrations;** Ongoing farming and field work would create minimal tractor noise. Other activities will be hands on experiences in the farm/livestock activities, which will not produce noticeable noise. Some other activities envisioned might be a chuck wagon bbq with educational speaker, farm gatherings; rodeo, equestrian and endurance events, barn gatherings or community gardening. Should any involve music or a speaker system, volume will be monitored. Winter experiences might be; feeding horses with bobsled; ski joring; ice skating; building Christmas toys in the barn or refinishing farm equipment in the shop. Any events that are prone to develop noise will be carefully managed for timing, behavior and location, to go mostly unnoticed. The property is large and can absorb activity, while maintain a quiet secluded atmosphere.

3. **Dust, glare and light;** Interior road are gravel. The long distance from neighbors does not cause a dust problem. Dust control equipment is on site to water roads and riding arena. The Farming operation will create dust from time to time when plowing fields.

**Glare, light;** Any new lighting will be down lighting on structures.

**Heat;** The only heat generated might be from a community barn dance!

4. **Smoke, fumes, gas or odors;** No significant changes from previous farm operations.

5. **Hours of Operation:** Hours of operation would be limited to primarily daytime with rare exception anything later. Farming operation, from time to time may go all night, as harvesting and haying are time sensitive and weather dependent.

#### **Additional Information, Day to Day operations on the Farm**

The next two years will focus on updating crops and rehabilitating infrastructure. Other activities will develop slowly as interest is created. Emphasis will be on minimal impacts to the property and surroundings. Daily visitor's numbers are an unknown. The plan is to offer a more complete experience to a few, rather than many. Once the Farm is updated, occasional farm tours, seniors, or school field trips might arrive by bus. Staff is estimated at 3-4 full times with 1-2 living on property, providing 24 hour oversight. The number of part time employees if any, are unknown. Daily visitor participants in Farm chores is guesstimated at 3-8 persons, likely less in winter. These numbers will adjust as interest increases or declines.

**No significant changes in buildings:** No new residential construction is planned. Any anticipated building would be basic, such as a restrooms, greenhouse or hay shed.

**Preserving the historical nature of the farm:** The Farm will remain essentially the same, yet updated. The livestock handling facilities and a riding arena will be rebuilt for teaching horsemanship and rodeo. The large red barn will be refurbished for displaying horse drawn wagons/ carriages and gatherings. The hand hewn log homestead cabin from 1896 will be restored as a historical display. The equipment shed and blacksmith shop will be renovated to showcase vintage items. The Charitable Foundation will collect historical items to showcase on site the early years of Farming in the Flathead Valley.

**Underground Infrastructure:** Basic infrastructure is in place. Natural gas service feeds the property.

**On site hydropower;** The emerald Spring flows more than 8,000 thousand gallons a minute year around over a 22' waterfall. A 1908 hydro turbine/generator once powering the Farm and surrounding area. A new cement flume was built to better manage pond water levels. It is intended to installing a new hydro/generator, to power the farm and showcase alternative energy. The original 1908 unit will be restored as a historic display. The project will meet environmental and utility regulations.

**Addressing the timber;** The Farm features old growth Ponderosa Pine. The timber will be managed for down, dying and disease timber, including milling onsite for farm use. Learning about silviculture could be one of the educational programs.

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**New Farm Feature:** The south 20 acres is an area set aside for growing "organic products" providing vegetables to local outlets. A greenhouse structure would be added east of the existing potato shed which would be utilized in the farm to market operation.

**Camp-Retreat best suited designation:**

*\*Planners don't make recommendations in pre-app - km 2-18-20*

County Planners recommended a Camp-Retreat as the best designation to fit the Farm's future. Camp-retreat includes a long list of multi-uses that would subsidize the agriculture. This location is in the cross hairs of urban creep, coming north and south along highway #35. Within 2 miles of the Farm entry gate are 5 churches and 23 businesses. Applying for conditional use is an alternative to strip development and subdivision, an attempt to preserve open space in the valley, which is rapidly disappearing.

The Plan is to share knowledge about life on a farm, agriculture and the western lifestyle; inspiring a child to grow up a new generation cowboy or farmer, all in hopes of adding longevity to the farms and ranches that make Montana 'the last best place'.

**ATTACHED:**

Legal descriptions separate attachment:

Site plan Information below:

Distances from closest property lines

Hay barn 320' to highway to east; Caretaker house 230' to hwy.; Grinder mill 420' to

hwy.; Main house 700' to hwy.; Shop 800' to hwy.; Red Barn 980' to hwy.; old

Homestead 1000' to hwy.; Blacksmith barns 1250' hwy.; Corrals, livestock buildings

1,800' to hwy. 700 ft' to neighbors pasture corner.

Site Plan, Building uses: The concept is simple with minimal change

1. Caretaker house, same use
2. Grinder mill, silos, same use
3. Shop, same use
4. Main house, used for gathering point, restrooms, history center with displays
5. Red barn, remove hay& livestock, clean up to display historic carriages/wagons
6. Blacksmith barn, same use, renovate
7. Equipment shed, same use, display antique farm equipment, tractors
8. Horse barn, same use for horse stalls
9. Lower roof barn, same use as small animal barn or possibly removed
10. Small livestock office, bunkhouse, one staff, same use
11. Long metal barn, same use, renovate
12. Tack room barn, same use, renovate

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13. Working chutes barn, same use, renovate
14. Calving shed, same use
15. South potato shed, same type use, store vegetables
16. South equipment and hay shed, same use
17. 1 outhouse at shop, two hole, same use, for bonding
18. 1 outhouse at corrals, two hole, same use, reading tabloids
19. 1 outhouse at homestead, three hole, for close family experiences

Maps Included:

Map showing access points

Map showing neighbors

Map showing farming, pivot

Map showing buildings with distances between

Map showing surface water, creek

Map showing future designated septic area

Map showing new well location

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